IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for transmission over packet networks, the method comprising:

detecting, at a first node, at least one next node;

creating a channel between the first node and the at least one next node;

receiving, at the first node, a first packet;

detecting a protocol of the first packet;

merging the first packet with a second packet of the same protocol as the first packet into a packet having a protocol different from both the protocol of the first packet and the protocol of the second packet; and

transmitting the merged first packet and second packet to the at least one next node via the channel.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the first packet contains circuit-based information.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the second packet contains circuit-based information.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

determining whether available bandwidth exceeds a predetermined threshold.

5. (Original) The method of claim 4, wherein the predetermined threshold is set to provide a minimum level of quality of service for voice communications.

6. (Original) The method of claim 4, further comprising:

rejecting a communication related to the first packet.

7. (Original) The method of claim 4, wherein the predetermined threshold is set to provide a minimum level of quality of service for data communications.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the first node is an existing media gateway.

9. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the first node is connected to a circuit-switched voice network.

10. (Currently Amended) An internet trunking protocol node comprising:

a channel interface for assigning a channel to a next node;

a port for transmitting and receiving a plurality of packets to and from the next node;

a processor for performing instructions in response to received packets; and

a memory, in communication with the processor, for storing a plurality of instructions, wherein the instructions comprise:

instructions, responsive to the receipt of a packet, for detecting a protocol of the packet;

instructions for merging a plurality of packets of the same protocol into a merged packet <u>having a protocol different from the protocol of the plurality of packets</u>;

instructions for splitting a packet comprised of a plurality of packets of the same protocol;

instructions for routing packets according to an internet protocol.

11. (Original) The internet trunking protocol node of claim 10 wherein the port is connected to a packet communications voice network.

12. (Previously Presented) The internet trunking protocol node of claim 10 wherein the port is connected to a media gateway through the packet communications voice network.

13. (Original) The internet trunking protocol node of claim 10 wherein the port is connected to a common packet communications voice network.

14. (Original) The internet trunking protocol node of claim 10 wherein at least one of the plurality of packets contains circuit-based information.

15. (Currently Amended) A method for establishing voice communication over packet networks, the method comprising:

receiving an internet protocol packet at a node in communication with a plurality of nodes;

splitting the internet protocol packet into a plurality of internet trunking protocol (ITP) packets, wherein each ITP packet of the plurality of ITP packets contains circuit-based information;

for each of the plurality of ITP packets,

determining a next node to which the ITP packet is to be transmitted;

determining whether available bandwidth to the next node exceeds a predetermined threshold;

assigning a channel to the ITP packet; and

if there is a second ITP packet that is to be transmitted to the next node, merging the second ITP packet with the ITP packet into a packet with a protocol different from both the protocol of the ITP packet and the protocol of the second ITP packet.